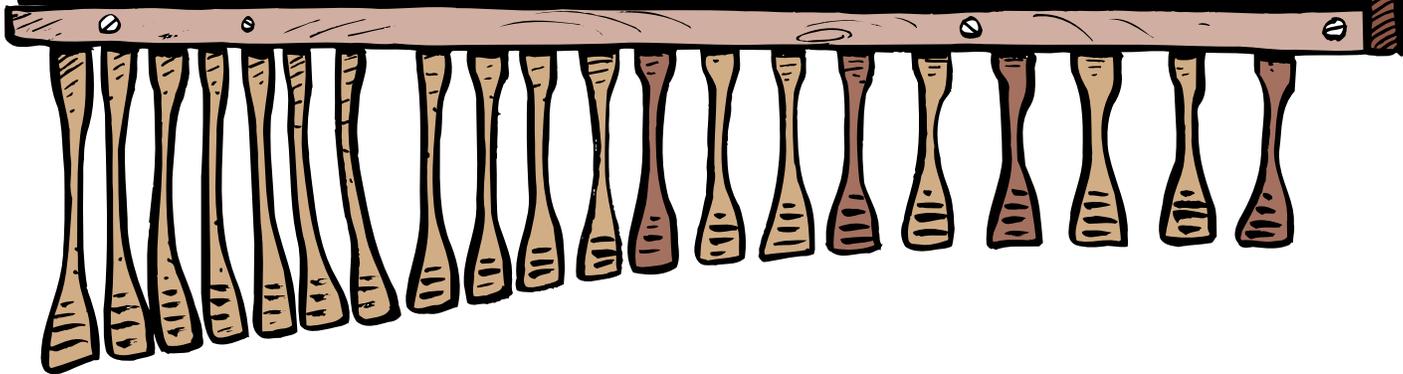


THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN NYCKELHARPA ASSOCIATION

NYCKELNOTES



Cultivating Roots

Nyckelharpa Stämman at the Leydon's, August 12-14, 2005

by Sally Chandler

Chris met us as we got out of the car. Bruce was unloading his instruments and I was staring at the spare, rhododendron-like shrubs growing beneath the tall windows which opened onto the studio where the stämman would take place.

"It's Franklinia," he said, "We took cuttings from the tree you saw as you come in the driveway."

I looked at the buds, full and ready to open at the end of the slender grey twigs and I was impressed. It's not easy to propagate woody shrubs from cuttings, and like any living organism, this plant would not flourish unless placed in

an environment which could sustain it—the right soil, light and moisture. I am a newcomer to Scandinavian-American music and dance and while I love the performance and the dancing, I am not a musician. I tagged along to be with Bruce, and to enjoy the company. At the same time, I know something about plants, and as I looked at these young plants it struck me as significant that this stämman would take place at a home where the hosts could successfully transplant one of North America's rarest and most lovely native shrubs.

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Attendees were Bruce Sagan, NJ, Bronwyn Bird, PA, Sally Chandler, NJ, Karen Nelson, Seattle, Martine Chiasson, Montreal, Peter Puma Hedlund, Sweden, Janet Jensen, Wisconsin, Tim Cresson, NJ, Chiara Bos, PA, Lenora Kandiner, NJ, Doug Oines, PA, Nancy Brown, PA, Rita and Chris Leydon, PA

World Champion Comes to West Virginia

A nyckelharpa week with Anna-Kristina Widell

by Matt Fichtenbaum

Each summer the hills of eastern West Virginia become a center for Scandinavian music and dance when Buffalo Gap Camp hosts the event known as Nordic Fiddles and Feet (NFF). Dance and music teachers from Sweden and Norway, and participants from all over the U.S., converge for an enjoyable, intense week.

In 2002 Anna-Kristina Widell won the biannual Nyckelharpa World Championship (VM i nyckelharpa) and her reputation, already considerable in Sweden, spread westward. She earned good reviews for her teaching at a Colorado workshop in the spring of 2004, and I'd admired her playing on Rita Leydon's video of the 2000 World Championship competition. So I was thoroughly looking forward to her classes this summer.

We were a small but dedicated group of nyckelharpa players, and NFF offers the luxury of three levels of instrumental classes, so the sessions had the nature of a shared private lesson—it was easy to hear Anna-Kristina, the other players, and oneself, and the mood was relaxed and encouraged informal interaction. And the rewards for participating were rich and copious.

I should say something about Ms. Widell's background and her repertoire, which are related. She grew up in Borås in Västergötland, and started playing fiddle around age nine. It's natural that she plays a lot of Västergötland music. Her father knew the great Uppland harpa player Ceylon Wallin, which led to the presence of a nyckelharpa in the household. And someone had the idea that it would be fun

Farmorspolska

Polska från Valö efter Ceylon Wallin. Taught by Anna-Kristina Widell at NFF 2005

The musical score for 'Farmorspolska' is presented in six staves. The first two staves show the main melody, which is a 3/4 time signature piece. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplet-like rhythms. There are several 'V' marks above notes, likely indicating bowing or fingering techniques. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat signs. The last two staves show a variation of the melody, with some notes marked with '1' and '2', possibly indicating different fingerings or bowings.

to show the harpa at school, which led to her learning her first harpa tune at age thirteen or fourteen and very very many after that. It is no surprise that her bunch of tunes includes many of Ceylon's.

In class we were exposed to some of each, and more. There's a well-known collection from Sexdrega in Västergötland, from the notebooks of two 1700s fiddlers named Johannes Bryngelsson and Anders Larsson, from which we learned two polonäs tunes (think halfway between slängpolska and Renaissance court dance). There were some Wallin tunes, and a couple of Byss-Kalle polskas, and more. Notes for two of the tunes accompany this article, and sound files of both can be found at: http://www.nyckelharpa.org/noindex/nn_mp3.html.

The student experience. Anna-Kristina taught by playing tunes in long phrases, and we were a relatively facile group of quick learners, which left time to explore other dimensions. The life and expression in her playing inspired us to try to understand her music and make our own as rich. She plays with a lot of variation, and was she articulate in giving examples and showing the range of possibilities. Beyond learning the tunes, I was inspired to understand what I was hearing, what she played and how she put the energy there. There was a lot of inspiration for my own playing, not just a list of details to follow.

Evenings at NFF are a dance party of half-hour sessions. There might be a review session for each of the three dance classes, one session for the gammaldans band, one each for Swedish and Norwegian requests, and a solo session for one of the staff musicians. Anna-Kristina played two solo slots during the week. She's a fine dance player: a light touch with plenty of air in her music, rhythmic ornaments when a note comes a bit early or a bit late or has an extra accent, melodic ornaments which she plays precisely and unhurriedly. Calm

and unruffled, she had a whole floor full of dancers moving to her music. She is well regarded as a dance musician in Sweden, and her NFF appearance confirmed why.

In summary, we who had the opportunity to be her harpa students, or to dance to her music, had a fine week. If, on one of her future trips west, you have a chance to hear her or attend a workshop with her, I can genuinely recommend seizing the opportunity.

Polonäs från Sexdrega

In Anna-Kristina's playing, the quarter-notes in measures 1, 3, and 8 often have a "pulse"—an accent—in the middle. Think of two eighth-notes slurred together. And the eighth-notes on the beats in measures 5 and 6 and the first beat of measure 7 are shortened, so that there's a pause before the next note. The same applies to the corresponding measures of the second part. Suitable double-stops, short in duration (for accent rather than chord sound) can add to the tune.

Farmorspolska efter Ceylon Wallin

Ceylon played with a lot of short bow strokes with space between notes, and Anna-Kristina achieves the same feeling in her playing. The dotted eighth-notes in measure 1, for example, are somewhat short, giving some space before the note that follows. And the two notes of the second beat of measure 2 are played on the same bow stroke but with space between them, so I have transcribed them as successive up-bows rather than a slur.

Anna-Kristina plays this tune with ornaments—grace notes before or after the melody notes—which I have not transcribed. The one exception is measure 5, in which one holds a finger on the C and moves the little finger from the G to the E, so the C sounds briefly in between. It's an ornament that Ceylon used, in this tune and others.

Polonäs

from Andres Larsson's notebook, Sexdrega collection, Västergötland. Taught by Anna-Kristina Widell at NFF 2005

The musical notation consists of four staves of music in 3/4 time, G major. The first staff shows the first four measures, with a dotted quarter note on G in measure 1 and a quarter note on A in measure 2. The second staff shows measures 5-8, with a dotted quarter note on G in measure 5 and a quarter note on A in measure 6. The third staff shows the first four measures of the second part, with a dotted quarter note on G in measure 1 and a quarter note on A in measure 2. The fourth staff shows measures 5-8 of the second part, with a dotted quarter note on G in measure 5 and a quarter note on A in measure 6. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and phrasing slurs.

2005 Stämman

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We followed Chris to the front door, took off our shoes in the foyer (the rule of the house) and stepped into the main room—a high-ceilinged kitchen with a large central counter laid with intimations of the meals to come—a vase filled with fresh dill, platters of home baked cookies, breads and cheese, fresh vegetables and fruit, and cool drinks. Rita set her work on the counter and welcomed us. She was going over her lists—but it looked to me like she had everything under control. The room had a feel of a party about to begin.

Peter, one of Sweden's primary tradition-bearers for nyckelharpa and the subject of Rita's DVDs, strode across the room to greet Bruce in Swedish.

"It is so hard always to talk in English," he said to me, laughing. "I have to think too hard." I observed to myself that my Swedish didn't allow me to think at all, and was suitably appreciative.

So here we are, I thought. The folks we would spend the weekend with were already present or just arriving, standing at the counter or seated in the adjacent living room: talking, smiling, looking at the new fiberglass nyckelharpa bows that Peter and Rita had ordered and made available.

"They are so inexpensive, and it is hard to find bows that are right for a nyckelharpa," he told us.

The evening set up the pattern that would fill the weekend—the usual teaching of new tunes, instruction in technique, trading of melodies and arrangements, trying out one-another's instruments, and playing for the love of those moments when you are the one making the music; but I'm

*Karen Nelson
communes
with
Rita's
Sablström
harpa.*



not a musician, so I can't really write about that. I'm writing about the rest of the weekend: the artful careful staging of people and place that cultivates soil where this tradition can send down strong, deep roots.

The first night's dinner, like all the meals of the weekend, was woven through with Swedish traditions—some of which were "special" and some which were every day. On Friday night, food was set, buffet-style, around the kitchen counter. We loaded our plates and walked out to the picnic table set beneath the arched canopy of a mature chestnut

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Bronwyn Bird and Bruce Sagan provide music to bring in the crayfish carried by Peter Hedlund and Chris Leydon.

2005 Stämman

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tree. I have been told Swedes take meals outside in the summer any chance they get, that they cherish time spent outside, and the Leydons arranged this simple pleasure for us. We ate every meal beneath the sky.

The main course was *tjälknöl*, meat (often moose, though for us it was beef) marinated in brine and served cold. We also had blueberry soup. As Rita told us how the dishes were prepared and served, Peter indicated that at least for the blueberry soup, it hardly seemed special enough to remark on. Even if it had been “just regular,” of course, at least for me, it wasn’t. Even if I made blueberry soup once a week for the next year, it would remain special to this weekend, part of traditions and culture woven into the music and experiences of the weekend.

The highlight of the weekend, at least in terms of the food, was the crayfish celebration on Saturday night. Rita explained to us that the beginning of August marked the start of crayfish season and that people throughout Sweden were now sitting down to dinner celebrations of this same kind. She’d cooked the crayfish in the traditional dill and brine and they held the position of honor during the *gånglåt* to the table beneath the trees. The table was set with party hats and special red knives, and Peter sat at the head—to instruct us on how to eat crayfish “the traditional way.” This particular tradition involves a great deal of sucking and slurping up of the brine, and for us it also involved a lot of laughing. What can I say? It takes a lot of work to get a good bite of meat out of a crayfish—but it is more than worth it. We took our time, and it got dark and the fireflies came up around us. The cicadas sang their autumn song, and we sang toasts—some traditional, some not—and pretty soon someone brought out a nyckelharpa and there was a third strand of music which seemed to tie it all together.

Bronwyn leads a special session for beginner players in the kitchen.



Bronwyn Bird and Bruce Sagan jammed every spare moment.

When it was time to leave, I walked down the driveway to take one last look at the tree which parented the shrubs by the house. *Franklinia* was first cataloged in 1770 and it was named for Benjamin Franklin. It has not been found in the wild since 1790 and it is not currently available in commerce. The specimen at the Leydon’s was open branched, and it was blooming. The clear, white flowers—bright petals surrounding an inner ring of fat, powdery yellow stamens—smelled spicy, sweet, like something I didn’t quite have the language to describe. I thought how rare it is to have such flowers in the heat of late August.

It takes a special talent to nurture a living tradition taken whole from its native soil and transported to another place. The Leydons have the gift.

We Weren't Strangers to the Nyckelharpa

by Lenora Kandiner

We'd first heard Bruce Sagan play nyckelharpa about ten years ago at the Dance Flurry in Saratoga Springs, NY. Over the intervening years, we'd heard other people play it at NEFFA (New England Folk Festival) and Ashokan (Fiddle and Dance at Ashokan, NY). But hearing Peter Puma Hedlund play it at the Champlain Valley Folk Festival in Vermont at the beginning of August, 2005, took me to another level. The sound touched my heart and I had to learn to play nyckelharpa. I already played flute and some fiddle for contra dances and English country dances, and had played some Scandinavian fiddle at Ashokan. My partner, Tim, played penny whistle and piano and a little bit of fiddle. However, I already had a very overcommitted schedule.

We also met Rita Leydon at Champlain Valley, and heard about the American Nyckelharpa Association. When we returned home I went online and found the informative web site. I saw that the ANA's Stämman was the following weekend in Lahaska, PA, and that was only forty-five minutes away from our house. Amazingly, we didn't have anything on our calendar yet for the entire weekend, or at least nothing we couldn't miss. I e-mailed Rita and asked if there was still room, and if I could borrow or rent an instrument, since the web site said that both beginners and experienced players were welcome. The answer came back affirmative on both counts. Meanwhile, Tim decided I wasn't going to have a new musical experience without him, so we asked if

there was room for both of us, and if there was yet another instrument available. The answer was yes, with a note that since this was an ANA activity, we should really be members. So we wrote out checks for the Stämman and membership and we headed for Chris and Rita Leydon's place.

We arrived on the early side, taking the position that it's easier to meet a whole bunch of new people a few at a time. Rita and Peter Puma Hedlund were in the kitchen with Karen Nelson from Seattle. Karen was about to have her private lesson with Peter. Martine Chiasson arrived from Montreal a few minutes later. By dinner time the house was full of people and harpas. After a sumptuous repast, everyone moved to the living room and started jamming. Rita had suggested we might want to bring our fiddles to learn the tunes, but after I took mine out and played a couple of tunes, I decided I didn't want to spoil the rich nyckelharpa sound. After a break to get something cold to drink, Peter and Rita realized that Tim and I really wanted to get started on our learning experience, so two nyckelharpas appeared, Peter tuned them, showed us how to hold them and started us playing a scale. We learned that the nyckelharpa was not tuned the same way as a fiddle, and that drove me crazy for a while. This first start was aptly captured by Rita as part of the Stämman picture album.

On Saturday morning we were in with the entire group and picked up some good pointers, although some of the tunes were beyond our abilities. In the afternoon, Bronwyn Bird worked with the beginners. This included the two of us, plus Janet Jensen from Wisconsin, and local player Doug Oines, who had been playing for about a year.

Meanwhile, the rest of the group learned a hard tune in the next room. That session improved our comfort level. After dinner, while people were partying, I found myself back with my borrowed nyckelharpa trying to pick out other tunes I knew in my head. Even if I couldn't play them properly, I was just trying to get the feel of where the notes were. I found all the notes for *Gånglåt från Äppelbo*, which I had played many times on fiddle at Ashokan. I also played scales. I can't remember the last time I practiced scales on any instrument—probably not since I was very young. At some time during the weekend I asked Tim if I could try his borrowed harpa, and we switched. I could tell the difference in the tone and the feel of the instrument. That told



Lenora Kandiner and her partner Tim enjoy a nyckelharpa moment.

me that I needed to get more than a “beginner” instrument for myself.

On Monday, with new tunes and techniques running through my head, I went on the ANA web site to learn more about the various makers, figuring we were going to have to plan a vacation in Sweden so I could get a nyckelharpa. There on the home page was a notice of a Tage Larsson nyckelharpa for sale. I e-mailed Ravi Khalsa, who was selling it, and found that she was in New Mexico, near Santa Fe, and that I was not the first person to inquire about it. After several e-mails back and forth, a phone call, and a quick check of availability of frequent flyer mile tickets, we told her we were definitely interested. She e-mailed the other person who had inquired first, and he was not ready to make the trip to get it or buy it sight unseen, so it was ours if we wanted it. We decided that Labor Day Weekend in Santa Fe wasn't a bad backdrop for the excursion, since I'm an artist and Santa Fe is artist heaven.

Meanwhile, my birthday arrived, and I could guess by the shape of the package that it was Peter's DVD Nyckelharpskola volume I. Tim had found time to buy it at the Stämman while I was somewhere else so he could surprise

me with it. So we played the first few lessons to refresh our memory before we headed to Santa Fe.

Labor Day weekend there's a big arts and crafts festival on the plaza, in addition to everything else going on in Santa Fe. Saturday we hadn't yet connected with Ravi, so we took in the show. On Sunday we met Ravi at her school and played her nyckelharpa, then exchanged a check for it, and took it back to our hotel in Santa Fe, to play it some more. We had picked a flight back which didn't involve changing planes, and had decided that this was a time when first class frequent flyer seats would be a definite advantage, although it left Albuquerque at 6 am. The trip home was uneventful for us and for the harpa. It has already had its first appearance in public, at a Rum and Onions band rehearsal (Princeton's Halloween dance band). It is the first nyckelharpa in the Princeton NJ dance musician community, so I attracted a small crowd playing *Friarvisan*. I've also mastered Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, and I'm working on playing on two strings. I haven't figured out yet what I'm going to give up in my busy schedule in order to learn to play nyckelharpa—maybe I'll just have to learn how to make better use of my time.

The Incredibow, or ... one thing just led to another

by Rita Leydon

One day last spring, I met some new folks at my coffee shop. Betty was a guitar instructor and Marty played cello. Marty went on and on about some new type of synthetic bow he'd found on the internet. It was zany and razzmatazz, amazing in all ways and he was thinking of getting himself one. He wrote down the name of it on a napkin: Incredibow.

I checked it out. The site showed bows in oodles of colors, enough to make any desirous heart happy. Violin bows, cello bows, bass and viola bows ... You could order up any length you wanted, different frogs, with added weight or without. The flaming rainbow Aurorabow Realis tickled my fancy. It wasn't very expensive as bows go, had a can't-possibly-lose guarantee and was odd enough to be a real raucous attention grabber. This is the perfect gift for Peter Puma I thought as I dialed Ed Wilcox to discuss a nyckelharpa version. Nyckelharpa wasn't in Ed's vocabulary yet.

Peter probably didn't need a new bow, especially not a synthetic one picked out by Rita. Preposterous idea. Even if he did require a new bow, he'd get himself a proper horse hair with a wooden stick variety. He'd get a real bow. But I know Peter, and he enjoys one-upmanship, and showing off a bit now and then doesn't hurt if you're a performance art-

ist. Strutting your stuff and wowing the public. I envisioned him whipping out the zany flashy bow for a number or two, the spotlights making it dance like crazy, and the audience sitting agape in wonder of it all. Perfect.

Ed understood that the bow was intended for a world class Swedish musician who would undoubtedly give the bow exposure in places it hadn't yet been seen and proposed sending me two flaming bows for the price of one. He was way ahead of me from the git go. I didn't think so much of it other than how nice to get an extra bow. What a deal!

So I wrap up the bow all pretty and fly to Sweden, drive up to Hälsingland and hand deliver it to Peter along with all manner of verbal babbling, apologies and disclaimers for my seemingly absurd gift selection. Peter smiles that killer smile of his and accepts the offering. He's got no clue what I'm up to ... and I'm feeling like maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all ... hoping he takes it as a lighthearted gesture between friends. Hoping he doesn't think I've lost my mind completely. Peter looks at the translucent, shimmering stick, grabs a cake of rosin and gives it a rub down. Peter's wife Karin is in the kitchen too and we girls hold our breaths and sit with rapt attention as the Puma puts the new Incredibow

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Incredibow

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from America through its paces. Karin lets out a squeal of delight at the unexpected rainbow shimmers coming from the stick. It's alive! Peter glances up at us with a smug smiling nod indicating that all is well. After a bit he pauses long enough to declare it a fine bow. Phew ... I was totally exhausted!

The next day as I was preparing to shove off, Peter pokes his head into the guest room and says that he really likes the new bow and wonders if there might be an opportunity here. Opportunity? Wadd'ya mean? Well, he says, it's getting harder and harder to find people who want to make the traditional bows and this might be a good, and at the same time, cost efficient alternate solution. He's serious. Aha! Peter and Ed are on the same page while I'm obviously trailing a bit behind.

I flew back home to the US, and Peter stowed the Incredibow in his gig bag along with his other bows and started incorporating it into his public appearances. When that bow is in motion, it mesmerizes a room ... people fall all over themselves wanting to see it better. Peter found himself showing and talking up the bow pretty much every time he played. Interest was keen and some folks would have bought one on the spot ...

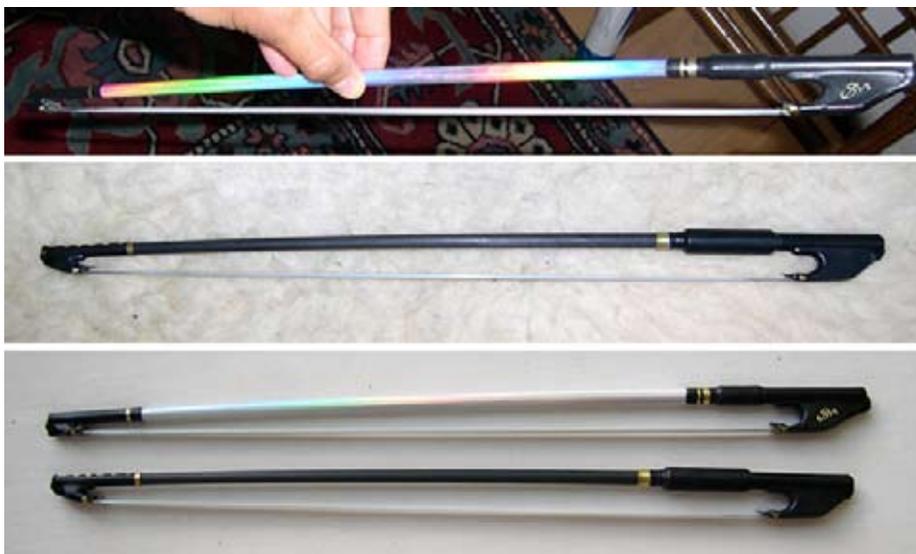
We decide to approach Ed Wilcox about some arrangement

regarding nyckelharpa bows. Sure thing, no problem. Peter had some suggestions and wishes for a better nyckelharpa version and Ed made up a new prototype. We came to an agreement with Ed, and voila, we're in the bow business! We are now the exclusive resellers of nyckelharpa Incredibows and non exclusive resellers of any other sort of Incredibow, should we meet, say, a fiddle player who just has to have one too.

This isn't what I had in mind when I locked eyes on that first razzmatazzy bow, but then ... one thing just led to another ...

End note:

The next issue of *Nyckel Notes* will have an in-the-field report from Peter about this new bow ... the Incredibow!



Annas Visa

by Rita Leydon

Peter Puma Hedlund and I were at Jamestown this summer where he was performing at their Scandinavian Festival. On the last day there is a church service where the musicians all play. *Annas Visa* was one of the tunes played by Sigtuna Spelmän. Peter and I were both thunderstruck by this tune, as we discovered in the car afterwards. "There was this wonderful tune ..." he said, and hummed the tune ... the same one I had reacted to. As soon as he got his nyckelharpa in his hands he was working to recapture the tune. He played it at several other appearances during the rest of his visit in the USA, always saying first, "I just heard this tune in Jamerstown, a lovely waltz by Leif

Göras." He played it simply without much embellishment for he said it is so new to him that he hasn't had time to feel out yet how he wants to embellish it, if at all. I'm not sure if he actually taught the tune at the Lahaska stämman for I was mostly in the kitchen doing dishes and cooking, but it is on the recording of the session tunes that Doug Oines was kind enough to share with me. The stämman was at the tail end of Peter's trip.

I wrote to the tune's maker, Leif Göras, who is one of the Orsa Spelmän, and asked permission to print his tune in *Nyckel Notes*. He said it was written about 25 years ago for his daughter.

Annas Visa

Musik: Leif Göras
1

The first system of music consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 3/4 time signature. The bottom staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The melody in the top staff begins with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, C5, and a dotted quarter note B4. The bass line starts with a half note G2, followed by quarter notes A2, B2, and C3. Chord symbols are placed below the bass staff: A, E, A, D, Bm, E.

The second system continues the melody and bass line. The top staff features a repeat sign with first and second endings. The first ending leads back to the beginning of the system, while the second ending concludes the phrase. Chord symbols in the bass staff include A, E, A, A, D, E7, A, and A.

The third system continues the piece. The top staff shows a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The bass staff provides accompaniment with chord symbols A, D, Bm, and E.

The fourth system continues the melody and bass line. Chord symbols in the bass staff include E7, D, A, A7, and D.

The fifth system concludes the piece. It features a final melodic phrase with a repeat sign and first/second endings. The bass staff includes chord symbols Bm, A, E7, A, and A.

Nyckelharpa Strings for Sale

The American Nyckelharpa Association is pleased to announce the availability of strings for the nyckelharpa! We have five different products for you — two brands of playing strings and three versions of understring sets.

Playing Strings

The playing strings are the four largest strings, the ones that you actually touch with the bow. We carry Prim strings, manufactured in Sweden.

Prim brand strings are made by an old Swedish string manufacturing company. Their fiddle strings are popular among folk musicians, and are available widely in the US. Their nyckelharpa strings are basically the same as their cello strings, except that they are the correct length for nyckelharpas instead of about a foot too long. All four strings are wound. The A-string is .020" (0.50 mm) in diameter.

Sympathetic Strings

We offer three versions of understrings, described more fully in the January 1998 edition of *Nyckel Notes*. Basically, the three sets can be called 6+6, 4+4+4, and 12-step. There's actually some logic here:

6+6 is

- 6 wound strings .021" (0.53 mm) in diameter
- 6 plain strings .014" (0.36 mm) in diameter

4+4+4 is

- 4 wound strings 0.24" (0.61 mm) in diameter
- 4 wound strings .021" (0.53 mm) in diameter
- 4 plain strings .014" (0.36 mm) in diameter

12-step is

- 12 strings, varying from .025" (0.64 mm) to .014" (0.36 mm), by steps of .001". The lower 6 are wound, the higher 6 are plain.

Order Form

Prices are listed for ANA members/non-members.

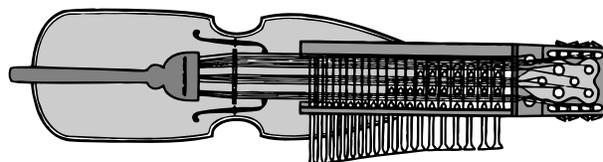
Price includes shipping in the US.

Add an appropriate extra amount for international orders.

String Set	Qty	Price	Cost
Prim Playing Strings	_____	\$57/\$64	\$_____
6+6 Resonance Strings	_____	\$20/\$25	\$_____
4+4+4 Resonance Strings	_____	\$20/\$25	\$_____
12-step Resonance Strings	_____	\$20/\$25	\$_____
<i>(Make checks out to "ANA")</i>		Total:	\$_____
Name	_____		
Street	_____		
City	_____		
State	_____	Zip	_____
Phone	_____		
E-mail	_____		

Send this form, with a check made out to the American Nyckelharpa Association, to:

Tim Newcomb
P.O. Box 51, Montpelier, VT 05602



Tage Larsson, Nyckelharpa Builder

by Marika Jakobsson and
Håkan Ljungqvist
translated and adapted by
Rita Leydon

Tage Larsson was born on June 17, 1922, close to where he still lives in Skövde, Västergötland, Sweden. He is one of three siblings fathered by Johan Larsson, a small scale farmer and carpenter who was also a well known artist and woodcarver in the general vicinity. It was a rich and nurturing environment for the growth and development of Götaland's finest nyckelharpa builder to date.

We have known Tage for a while now and felt it was time to interview him and write something for publication, so we invited him over one wintry evening and whiled away a few hours cozy by the wood stove in the kitchen. Tage's energy and zest for life bubbles over and belie his advanced age—he'll be 83 this summer and he's still got lots of irons in the fire.

Marika on Tage:

I first met Tage in the early 90s and after few years I purchased one of his hurdy gurdys which has given me much pleasure along with my fiddle playing.

Tage Larsson is undeniably a valued cultural figure in our town, enriching not just Skövde, or even all of Västergötland, but, in fact, enriching distant and far corners of the world with the fine instruments he builds. His nyckelharpas have found their way to the USA, Ireland, and even Japan. That he lives and works in the same community as I do brings to mind my appreciation for the importance of access to and availability of good craftsmen at the local level. Tage is a frequent participant in a variety of musical gatherings and festivals as well as handcraft shows. He displays and sells his nyckelharpas and other fine wooden objects that he makes.

Tage brought along a photo album and showed us pictures from a recent trip to America. He is thoroughly mod-



ern, being internet savvy and connected with email and his own website. When he leaves, he gives me his business card and suggests smilingly that I do a search on Google under “nyckelharpa.”

Håkan on Tage:

I first met Tage and his wife Siv in the mid 80s. I visited them in Hentorp to try out a nyckelharpa. The harpa was built in 1980 and I liked it well enough to buy it. Since then, Tage has made two more nyckelharpas for me as well as a hurdy gurdy.

Guests were always welcome at Tage and Siv's and over the years I have made my share of spontaneous drop-in visits. More often than not, I was afforded the honor of test driving a freshly minted nyckelharpa. Tage wanted to know if anything was amiss or could be improved upon. At first, it

was difficult for me to express any negative comments, but I soon realized that this was an important part of Tage's building process. He genuinely wanted constructive feedback because it challenged him to invent, develop further, and to improve the next nyckelharpa he built. In reality, it was seldom that I found any fault among the details since most all of Tage's harpas are of a consistently high quality. His expertise and care in construction are clearly evident in every detail of his instruments.

I could tell you a lot more about Tage, such as when I ordered a set of drawings from Gotland for a middle ages type hurdy gurdy and Tage made one just like it for me. But that is a different story.

Tage on himself:

My interest in music and instruments was awakened when I was young and my father built a fiddle for us kids to play on. But at that time one had to go out and earn one's keep early in life, and at age 13 I started working

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Tage Larsson

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as a farm hand for 15 crowns per month. I found that I didn't care much for farming. In 1939 I changed course and received training as an auto mechanic. A couple of years later I switched to aviation and became an assembler of Caproni airplanes. Those were very poorly designed Italian planes and one would crash almost every month. During my military service I also worked with airplanes. After the service I went back to auto mechanics and during the summers I worked up at the soaring school on Älleberg. It was a wonderful time and there was never any shortage of work because auto mechanics were always in demand.

I took some evening courses and learned to play fiddle and mandolin. I wasn't very gifted musically but discovered great joy in building instruments for I made a fiddle and a mandolin during that time. I decided that I would be an instrument builder when I retired.

I've always had an interest in motors and machinery, and took some courses in drafting and machine construction which led to work in the lumber industry. I had much to do when the sawmill needed to be modernized and stayed in this branch for twelve years, followed by a stint at Sahlström's Machinery (no relation to Eric) working with agricultural equipment up until retirement.

I met Eric Sahlström back in the 70s when he played at Läckö and bought some nyckelharpa drawings from him. The nyckelharpa had become very popular by then and a building course was offered in Skövde with Jan-Erik Wadén as instructor. I built two harpas. A girl bought one. I built two more and they sold quickly, and that's how it's been ever since. Mostly nyckelharpas, both finished and as kits, and a few hurdy gurdys.

One day a woman from the USA called, she was visiting relatives nearby and heard there was a nyckelharpa builder in the area. She wanted to meet me and see my harpas. Her name was Rita Leydon and she bought one of my harpas and has spread interest for nyckelharpas in her country. One day a fellow from Japan called, Rickford Grant, and he's written much about nyckelharpa in his country.

Rita Leydon's mother was very involved in soaring back at the time she lived here in Västergötland. She set many Swedish records for her flying and in the summer of 2003, Rita presented her mother's flight records and papers to the Soaring Museum at Älleberg. In addition to a fly-in, the occasion was marked with a spelmansstämma on the mountain and a concert by Rita's good friend Peter Puma Hedlund, two time nyckelharpa world champion.

To build a nyckelharpa requires much time and patience if the results are to be good. I build essentially after Eric Sahlström's model, but I have made many small modifications of my own over time—the wood I use is spruce, the sides are sloped, which makes for smooth and easy construction. I use maple for the keys, tailpiece and bottom. Before, much alder wood was used and a model after Herold Lundin was followed resulting in a heavy and clumsy instru-

ment that seldom sounded good.

It is always exciting to put strings on a new harpa the first time, to see if maybe this is a better instrument than the last one. It is like playing the lottery. It is difficult to tell someone how long it takes to build a nyckelharpa, it depends on how careful you are and how much embellishment you want and what tools you have available. But if you want to build one yourself, you have to figure between 200 to 400 hours if you want a nice nyckelharpa for there are always surprises you hadn't counted on.

To contact Tage Larsson:

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website: <http://welcome.to/tagesnyckelharpor>



Bronwyn Bird spent the 2004-2005 school year studying at the Eric Sahlström Institute in Tobo, Sweden. Here she is with a guest teacher, Johan Hedin. Bronwyn was awarded the Eric Sahlström Scholarship to attend the Ekebyholm Nyckelharpa course this past summer in Rimbo, Sweden. She's now attending the Berklee School of Music in Boston — the first nyckelharpa student there ever.

The Österby Youth Championship Competition

by Bronwyn Bird

My realization that I was actually participating in the Österby Youth Championship did not really sink in until I was backstage, as we all sat around nervously tuning our nyckelharpas. It felt as if the entire room sucked in a deep breath and had simply forgotten to let it back out again. Our fingers scampered over the wooden keys of our harpas, checking and double-checking that they still knew where to go. It was as if we were afraid that when we weren't looking the tunes might have just leaped out of our minds and run away altogether.

I was glad that I was not playing first or last at least ... but I was still pretty nervous. After all, I have enough trouble trying to convince myself that I am any good, without having to convince an audience and a panel of judges as well. In fact, the idea of participating in the event in the first place certainly hadn't been mine. It had begun as a request from Rita Leydon, soon to be followed by multiple requests from Josefin Berglund (whom I was living with during my summer in Sweden). Somehow, those two managed to convince me that it was the thing to do, and persuaded me to give it a go.

Talking to the other contestants beforehand actually calmed my nerves a bit. One was a 13-year-old boy who had only been playing for about a year and a half. I thought, "Well if HE has the guts to go out there and show them what he's got, I'M certainly not going to chicken out either!"

Another thing that stopped me from worrying about my playing was the sudden realization that I hadn't actually thought about what I was going to say beforehand! So my mind quickly became preoccupied with this new problem. I definitely wanted to present the tunes in Swedish ... but at the same time, it would have been better to practice something in advance so I could be certain that the grammar was correct. Oh well! I concluded that I would just have to give it a go in Swedish anyway, and hope that they would at least appreciate the effort.



I watched in silence as the people before me played their tunes. I think I was more nervous for some of them than I was for myself! The few that I had talked to previously had wanted so desperately to win, whereas, at least for me, winning was not my main goal. I figured I couldn't really lose because either I would A) win a medal, or B) have two tunes which I could now play better than I ever could before I decided to participate in the event. A win/win situation. Not a bad deal!!! I might have been a little more concerned about winning if I hadn't contracted strep throat the week before. Now my main goal was just to make it through without being sick, and be able to say I did it!

When I stepped onto the stage I was actually a lot more relaxed than I thought I would be. I introduced myself and played my two tunes, *Polska efter Nisse Nordström*, and *Trollrikepolska*. I could see many of my friends out in the audience, including Rita and Josefin, and I knew that they were all cheering me on. Best of all, I could see feet tapping, heads bobbing, and overall energy in the audience. So at the very least I knew I was making the audience move in some way—a good sign! I grinned out at them. The way I look at it is, I may not be able to give them the best music performance ever ... but I can at least give them a happy smile and some enthusiasm!

A tidal wave of relief swept over me when I had finished. I definitely hadn't played my best ever ... but I certainly hadn't played my worst either. Overall it had gone better than I expected it to and I was more than satisfied. Best of all, I had done it ... and no matter what the result, that is something to be proud of!

Editor's note: Bronwyn, a native of Pennsylvania, had just completed a full school year at the Eric Sahlström Institute in Tobo, Sweden, and many of her ESI classmates were among the competitors. Now Bronwyn is back in the USA and studying at the Berklee School of Music in Boston.

Mid-Summer Folk Tour of Sweden June-July 2005

by Laurel Paulson-Pierce

For two weeks, we travelled around Sweden meeting many musicians and attending music festivals, award ceremonies, small neighborhood jams and family music sessions. Our group consisted of Michael and Marilee Cowan from the Portland, Oregon area, myself, Laurel Paulson-Pierce, and our tour guide, Tim Rued. Tim is fluent in the Swedish language and is one of the few non-Swedes to have been awarded the Zorn bronze medal for playing traditional Swedish fiddle tunes.

Between us we had two fiddles, a guitar and two nyckelharpor. We played music nearly every day, either in churches, at our motels, hostels and bed and breakfast, at people's homes, in community center music gatherings, at a rest home, in museums and parades and on stages with large groups of players, and in the forest. Several times we shared some music from America such as fiddle tunes or folk songs. We met record producers, performers, instrument makers and music lovers all over Sweden.

The first person we met was Lisa White, a woman from California, who went to Sweden with Tim many years ago and loved it there so much, she stayed. She was our tour guide in Uppsala. We visited the apartment of Olle and Ingrid Paulsson and had a nice little jam session.

Olle is a fiddler and owner of Drone, a recording company which has done a lot to preserve Swedish traditional music, came to our hostel in Sunnersta Herrgård and we played music until the wee hours. The mid-summer sky was still light.

The Swedes were amazed to find that we were Americans playing this traditional music from their culture!

Next we met Gunnar Persson and we played some fiddle tunes in a church with him. Then he showed us a nature preserve where we saw Lilies of the Valley and some beautiful and rare Lady Slipper Orchids as well as some moose tracks in the mud.

We also went to Älvkarleby and saw a monument to a famous nyckelharpa player, Byss-Kalle (Carl Ersson Bössa) who lived from 1783-1847. We also visited statue of Uppland fiddler Gås Anders (Anders Ljungqvist) in Björklinge who lived 1815-1896 and a monument commemorating fiddler Viksta-Lasse (Leonard Larsson) of Viksta (1897-1983).

Heading north to Gästrikland, we were treated to two lovely dinners at the home of fiddler Stig Sjödin, and his wife Inger. We celebrated his 73rd birthday there. He and

his family have operated the 200 year old water-driven grain mill near Storvik, providing the rye flour for the Leksands flat bread company. Those are the hard tack crackers which are round and have a hole in the middle. In the olden days this knäckebröd was hung on a rod near the kitchen ceiling.

We stayed for two nights at Råbacka pensionat near Torsåker with Tommy and Kerstin Nielsen and their kids Liv and Jens. Kerstin had two nyckelharpor made by her father which Tim repaired and adjusted so they could be played better, and then he played a few tunes on them.

We then travelled north to Hälsingland which is famous for the Hambo dance where they hold competitions and contests. We attended the Bergsjöstämman where if you bring your instrument you get in for free. We participated in the Allspel, led by O Törge-Kaisa, and we all received vouchers for food.

We watched and listened in the audience as many wonderful musicians performed on stage, including a youth group which was just celebrating the release of their new recording. In the adjoining living history museum, there were jam sessions in each room of the historical buildings and we joined in the playing and met some wonderful musicians, among them were Britt Marie Sving and her son Per-Olof. They coached Marilee and me in some tunes.

Per-Olof had been an A.F.S. "exchange" student in Ohio. After travelling south through Rättvik in Dalarna we stayed at a hostel (Vandrerhem) in Borlänge and went to a fiddler's Stämman at Aspeboda, near Falun.

Near Örebro we visited the castle and were treated to a wonderful dinner and music session on the back porch at Karl-Erik and Kerstin Johansson. There was a gathering of musicians including nine nyckelharpor. Tim's friend Åke Uhlin brought an instrument which he had made, a symphonia.

We had a long drive down the eastern shore of Lake Vättern to Olle Paulsson's family home where he and his wife Ingrid and daughter Ylva have a stuga (small summer cabin) near a farm house where his brother Pelle, wife Lotte and their sons live. This was near the shore of Lake Bellö near the village of Bellnäs seven kilometers from the town of Hjaltevad in Småland. We were invited to stay in two cabins near the horse pasture. These had belonged to people who had emigrated to America.

We hosted a barbeque and music party for the family and neighbors. Olle's mother played the pump organ and

her sons played with us, too. On the way to the National Fiddler's Gathering in Kalmar we saw the place where the movie *My Life as a Dog* was filmed. Luckily our van was large enough to give a ride to Olle with his instruments and CDs to go to the Annual Zorn medal festivities. We joined in the parade and a couple of Allspel sessions at this Rikspelman event, attended a concert by Olle and others, medal presentation ceremonies and dancing and fiddling everywhere around Kalmar.

On the island of Öland we had lunch by the sea with the Åhs family, Gertrude and her sons Magnus and Lars-Petter. Her husband Carl was awarded the Zorn Silver Rikspelman medal in 1985, a distinctive honor. Her brothers both lived in California and we were surprised to find Redwood trees growing in their yard!

On the last days of our time together, we stayed at the home of Sten and Karola Ericksson south of Stockholm in Gnesta. We were treated to a delicious dinner and the next

day took a train into Stockholm to the Music Museum and outdoor museum at Skansen. We were part of a concert at the Hemsbygård, the old village.

The next day we went our separate ways, the Cowans to Göteborg to pick up their new Volvo, Tim to Bingsjöstämman fiddle festival. When I was in high school, I had a Swedish "sister" A.F.S. student stay with my family. I have kept in touch with Margareta and was able to visit with her and her husband Torgny when I landed in Sweden. We spent a few days together after the tour, too.

With my friends, the Nordins, I explored my mother's ancestor's home area in Skåne. I was in Denmark for a few days and was able to meet my father's Danish relatives before returning home.

I am a radio programmer, and my show last Saturday was filled with music from Sweden. I am still tapping my toes to the polska beat! Tim is making plans for a 2006 tour—see www.folksweden.com for more.

Ben Teitelbaum

by Kajsa Kallqvist

Benjamin Lagerberg-Teitelbaum was born in Denver, Colorado, 1983. At age 17, after having been convinced by numerous athletic injuries that baseball and football were not to be in his future, Ben left high school sports for an interesting and unique musical instrument, the Swedish nyckelharpa. His interest in the nyckelharpa was part of a larger interest in his Swedish heritage. Shortly before he began to study this new instrument, he began teaching himself Swedish, and researching his family history that leads to the Swedish provinces of Värmland and Västergötland by way of Salina, Kansas. He was also able to establish contact with his first nyckelharpa teacher, Sheila Morris of Denver. Within a year of purchasing his first instrument, Ben won the 2000 Eric Sahlström scholarship for young Swedish folk musicians. The scholarship paid for a summer music course at Ekebyholm in Rimbo, Sweden. Ben was the second American to receive the scholarship. After the summer he returned to America with an ever-growing love of traditional Swedish folk music, and even managed to record a CD,

Bråkar, with best friend and guitar player, Patrick Sutton.

In 2001, after Ben had graduated from high school, he attended the Eric Sahlström Institute in Tobo, Sweden. The program at the institute is designed as a one-year course focusing on nyckelharpa history, nyckelharpa performance, and traditional dance. The institute has also historically served as a meeting place for many of today's rising stars in the Swedish folk music genre. While attending, Ben also made some important contacts. Mikael Grafström (Ångermanland, Sweden) and Olof Göthlin (Värmland, Sweden) were studying in the same class as Ben. In addition to both playing nyckelharpa, Mikael played guitar and Olof played fiddle. The three formed a group called Bjärv (a combination of the Swedish words for bear and wolferine). At the end of the study year at the institute the three decided to try and fulfill an ambitious dream: to tour the United States performing their music. Independently (with the exception of some help from Ben's family in the U.S.), the group sched-



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Ben Teitelbaum

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uled a tour of the Midwest and West Coast, with 22 performances and six radio visits. The summer tour in 2002 was a great success and the group continued summer touring in 2003 and 2004, playing at Scandinavian, folk, and world music festivals around the country.

During the rest of the year, while not touring, Ben spent his time in the closest place to Sweden in America; Lindsborg, Kansas. He enrolled at Bethany College, majoring in music. His main instrument was the nyckelharpa, although he would be receiving classical training on the instrument from a cello professor. This was the first time that nyckelharpa performance had been studied at a college level in America.

After having attended Bethany for two years, Ben received another opportunity to study in Sweden. In 2004 Ben was accepted into the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, Sweden, for a one-year program. The highly selective school has a trend setting and unique folk music department. As one of four nyckelharpa players at the school, Ben was able to work with world famous nyckelharpa player, Johan Hedin. In addition to nyckelharpa studies, students focus on aspects of Swedish folk music such as folk music history, dance, and ethnomusicology with accomplished teachers/performers Ale Möller (Frifot), Mikael Marin (Väsen), and Ellika Frisell. Perhaps the most defining aspect of the program is a "folk music theory" class with Professor Sven Ahlbäck. This class introduces a system

of music theory developed by Professor Ahlbäck as a means of analyzing folk melodies that might otherwise resist interpretation by traditional music theory. The development of the system has been a driving force in the expansion of folk music in Northern Europe's music conservatories. While at the school, Ben spent extra time learning about history, philosophy, and application of the system directly from Professor Ahlbäck. Ben intends to spread awareness of the system within musicology communities in the U.S. by holding workshops and lectures on the subject.

Throughout his travels and research in Sweden, Ben discovered that his interests lie not only in Sweden, but in Swedish-America as well. "It has become more, and more clear," Ben said, "that Swedish-America is a living sub-culture, independent from both today's Swedish and American cultures." Looking for a way to study and spur interest in Swedish-American culture, Ben has become interested in studying the music of the Swedish-American Midwest from the perspective of ethnomusicology. At the end of the school year in Stockholm, Ben will be traveling to Washington D.C. for a summer internship in ethnomusicology at the Smithsonian institute. While in Washington, Ben will be working with some of the leading researchers in the field and will assist them in preparing presentations.

In the fall of 2005, armed with a strong ambition to spread knowledge of his instrument, be an ambassador for a new style of folk music theory, and see Swedish-America recognized as an independent culture, Ben will be returning to Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas. Proudly anglicizing the name of the town with an American accent (as most able Swedish speakers do not), Ben said, "Lindsborg, and Bethany College, are the best places I could find myself right now. It is an environment that is both academically challenging and welcoming in its accommodation of my special needs as a nyckelharapist. It is an oasis of the arts set in the heart of my new-found passion; Swedish-America."

The American Nyckelharpa Association

The ANA is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering the nyckelharpa, its music and its dance in North America. We sponsor and produce music and dance workshops across the country featuring the traditions of the nyckelharpa.

Membership dues in the ANA are \$10/year, which includes a subscription to this newsletter. Send to the address below, and please indicate if you play the nyckelharpa and if we can publish your name in our roster.

ANA Web Page

Source of information about the nyckelharpa, nyckelharpa players, a history of the instrument, nyckelharpa events and more! The URL is: <http://www.nyckelharpa.org>

Nyckel Notes

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**The American Nyckelharpa Association
P.O. Box 661, Lahaska, PA 18931-0661**

Time for ANA Board Nominations!

Yes, it's that time again ... the terms of four of our board members—Sheila Morris, Bill Layher, Tim Newcomb, and Elise Peters—are about to expire.

I would also like to encourage ALL of you to get involved in this process... I seem to recall that one of our elections garnered a whole 11 voters out of 100+ members. Surely we can do better than this!

The current board is a bit weighted toward the east coast, with Sheila, in Colorado, being the furthest west. Nominate your friends—get some local representation! Or nominate yourself! It's not an especially demanding job—we "meet" online since we're so spread out.

Send nominations to Tim (tnewcomb@aol.com), and we'll publish them in the next issue.